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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the development of interest in teaching Portuguese to immigrant students, an interest rooted in an individual's ethnicity and cultural past. The story of a Portuguese couple who immigrated to Sweden with their young son is recited, emphasizing the child's struggle with his lack of identity with either Portuguese or Swedish culture. The heritage language programs in Ontario, Canada, are then described as programs that allow for schooling in the student's first language to enhance students' cultural identity and self-esteem. The historical development of the language programs is reviewed, and their goals are listed. Institutionalized discrimination towards such multicultural federal educational policies are noted. Qualifications of heritage language teachers are discussed, and it is explained that instructors need not have an Ontario teacher's certification, can be paid at a lower rate than regular classroom teachers, and occupy a lower status than regular classroom teachers. Heritage language teachers' difficulties in integrating themselves into the schools in which they teach are examined. The paper concludes that the way schools treat the heritage language of their students mirrors their manner towards race, culture, and identity, and that major changes in the program are needed. (Contains 22 references.) (JDD)

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NARRATIVE AND VOICE:

MARGINALIZED PERSPECTIVES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

HERITAGE LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Portugal, my country of origin, has been known as a source of immigrants to many countries over the centuries. My decision to become a language teacher was rooted in my ethnicity and cultural past. I have been teaching Portuguese to foreigners for many years, but my scope of interest expanded after a visit to a country where I met an immigrant couple whose child was struggling with his lack of identity. Based on this experience, I became a teacher of immigrant students and began to work closely with educators of minority language children. Later, an immigrant myself, I became an advocate of education which allows for schooling in the student's first language. Canada's multicultural policy exerted a significant influence in my choice of teaching in this country. From my experience of working with teachers of Heritage Languages, however, I became aware of the constraints they encounter in the schools. For a variety of reasons which I will explore, Heritage Language Teachers are not effectively integrated into the system. Indeed, they remain marginal. In the province of Ontario, Heritage Language teachers hold a lower status than the regular classroom teacher. That status, coupled with a general negative attitude towards language learning, contributes to the lack of motivation in language classes. This, in turn, makes it difficult to foster cultural pride and a sense of identity among minority language students.

"The deeper you go into memory, the deeper you go into language. And language belongs to origins. No, origins are not useless, but a source of personal identity".

Antonio D'Alphonso in The other shore (p.115)

The Portuguese

"Minha Pátria é a lingua portuguesa".
(My fatherland is the Portuguese language)

in Pessoa, F.[1]
Livro do Desassossego

The history of the Portuguese people is strongly connected with departure to other lands. In the fifteenth century the Portuguese began to explore the unknown world beyond Europe, to colonize it. After building and subsequently losing a great and powerful empire, [2] many continue to leave their homeland in order to find better conditions of life. Historians and other writers indicate two possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, the country established its borders very early in its history. The presence of Spain forced it to turn outward to the Atlantic as the route for economic expansion. The second explanation derives from the Portuguese national character. Studies on the Portuguese identity conducted by nationals and foreigners [3] point out two

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[1] - Fernando Pessoa is considered the greatest Portuguese poet of the century (1888-1935). Identity is a central theme in his work and is reflected in his use of several heteronyms (Alberto Caeiro, Alvaro de Campos, Ricardo Reis).

[2] - In April 25, 1974 there was a military Revolution which gave birth to a democracy after 40 years of dictatorship. After that Portugal gave independence to all its colonies.

[3] - See M. Unamuno Por tierras de Portugal e de Espana, Madrid, 1960; Keyserling, Analyse Spectrale de l'Europe, Paris, 1965; J. Seabra Cultura e Política, Lisboa, 1985; E. Lourenço O Labirinto da Saudade, Lisboa, 1982.

essential characteristics: errância and enraizamento, (literally wandering and rooting) meaning the duality between the search, the adventure, the wish to be where you are not; and a deep love for one's homeland. The idea of return is everpresent in the minds of Portuguese abroad. Both themes are expressed in the national literature.

Migration has been a permanent feature of the Portuguese people since the fifteen century. At that time the Portuguese were forced to leave the country by the Crown to populate the islands of the Azores and Madeira, the African coast and territories on the western coast of India, and Brazil.[4] Migration is still occurring; Canada, U.S.A. and Australia are some of the most popular countries to emigrate to.

Contrary to many other regions of Portugal, Alentejo, the province where I come from, reveals the lowest percentage of emigration. This region has always had a polarized distribution of wealth. On one hand, there were powerful landlords, and on the other, rural workers laboured in a quasi-feudal system. It was very hard to save money to go elsewhere. I had never heard about emigrants when I was a child. There is, however, a story related to an emigrant which is part of my childhood memories and which explains my interest in the subject.

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[4] - Estimates have been as high as: 3,300 people left Portugal in the sixteen century; from 1700-1760 the number went up to 600,000; from 1886-1926 statistics show 1,351,000; from 1926-1967 the numbers were 1,326,000. In Manuela Aguiar Politica de Emigracao e Comunidades Portuguesas. Porto: S.E.C.P., 1987

Rosa's story: portrait of an immigrant

When I was very young, I had an older friend named Rosa. Rosa was an elementary school teacher and she was the loveliest person I knew. She laughed a lot; she seemed happy all of the time. Rosa was our neighbour. She paid a lot of attention to me, and I wished very much to be old enough to go to school so I could be her student.

Rosa had a secret love affair with the son of the richest man of the village. Of course, since I was so young, I had never heard about this affair until the day the village woke up to the news that Rosa's father had tried to shoot her lover because Rosa was pregnant. I remember listening to people saying Rosa's father was trying to save his daughter's honour because at that time, in those villages, rich men prevented their sons from marrying poor girls.

Much later, I learned through Rosa that the father of her child had gone to a country named Sweden, and that she would join him one day. She trusted him. She would never allow herself to be defeated either by his family or her own; both of them wanted to make her believe that he had deserted her. She insisted that she would have their child and later meet up with him. It was clear that they loved each other very much.

For years I was impressed by this story. Rosa represented the poor beautiful girl loved by the prince who feared his wicked father. Sweden symbolized the magic place where happiness awaited these lovers. Rosa's physical beauty and her teaching job were

insignificant in the context of social stratification, where rich and poor lived separately. I realize that what happened to my friend Rosa taught me many important lessons about life. I also know that Sweden was kept in my memory as a country worth visiting, a country where there were promises of happy endings to tragic love stories.

I grew up never forgetting about Rosa, her little boy and her emigrant lover. I left the village to attend secondary school and finish university. It was only many years later that I had the opportunity to go to Sweden. Sweden is not one of the European countries where Portuguese choose to emigrate to. Its rough climate, its language, and probably its immigration policy too, keep Portuguese people away. It was difficult to understand why Rosa's lover had chosen Sweden. However, I knew, that Rosa, her son and husband had been living there for many years. I had also heard that Rosa was teaching Portuguese in Sweden to immigrant children.

My family had left the village long before the opportunity of going abroad came up, so I went to Sweden wondering if I could find Rosa's family without clues as to where they lived. When I arrived in Stockholm, in the middle of a cold November on my way to teach a five week course in Portuguese to Swedes, my thoughts were with Rosa. Of course I had some hope that the family would be in Stockholm since generally all emigrants are attracted to big cities. Besides, I thought to myself, if there were Portuguese classes in Sweden, they would take place in the capital. I looked for her family name in the telephone book. I was lucky to find it

easily as there were not many Portuguese names there. I called and she could hardly believe it was me as more than twenty years had passed since we last saw one another.

I was invited to spend a weekend with Rosa's family. I wondered curiously if her love story had a happy ending. I had also heard that Rosa had been teaching Portuguese in Sweden for years, so I was also curious about her classes and her students.

I was not disappointed. Rosa still looked young and pretty and I recognized her laughter from my childhood. After listening to Rosa and her husband's story, watching them looking tenderly in each other eyes, holding hands while memories were recalled, I shared their joy of being together.

An unhappy story: the son's divided identity

My encounter with Rosa and her husband, however, would have more meaning than simply seeking the ending to a love story. During that weekend we had the opportunity to talk about many things, in particular about their son. I had noticed with some surprise that their son was not living with them in Sweden. I was to discover that their son's story was not a happy one. Having left Portugal when he was seven to meet his father in Sweden for the first time, he suffered many problems of adaptation. He was divided between two cultures and felt unhappy in both of them. He started having problems at school. His appearance - his black hair and eyes, his dark skin, did not help. Swedish children called him a "Turk" and

were cruel to him. He hated school and did not do well. His parent's broken Swedish was a cause for embarrassment with his friends. Five years later his parents decided to send him back home to a boarding school. This did not help. His lack of fluency in Portuguese (compared with his schoolmates), the strict rules, and the isolation from his parents made him a rebel. He hated the lack of freedom, and when he went to his grandparents' home for the holidays, he caused a great deal of trouble. He kept moving back and forth, from one country to the other, unhappy in both, not attending school long enough anywhere, sometimes finding a part-time job temporarily. His parents did not know what to do. They loved him very much but were unable to help him.

I was deeply impressed with the story of this boy. It seemed very sad that the couple's happiness was overshadowed by their sadness over their son's lack of identity.

Immigrant children: their struggle for success

Up until that moment I had never given much thought to the hundreds of thousands of Portuguese immigrants who have for centuries been living stories of integration or assimilation in host countries. [5] Rosa's experience with other children of Portuguese origin in Sweden provided new information which I could

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[5] - I see integration as exemplified by the Canadian model of multiculturalism and assimilation by the American model of "melting pot".

never forget. Rosa told me that she did not have many students; however, she had a full day's work. The object of the Swedish policy was to provide every immigrant child with her or his heritage language class. Consequently, Rosa travelled all over Stockholm to teach, most of the time, individual children. She had been doing this for seventeen years - she had never had another job. She told me about a typical school day, how she would travel from school to school; the difficulties of communicating with the regular teachers due to lack of time or language skills; the students' problems in adapting; the lack of communication between parents and the child's regular classroom teacher and the lack of pedagogical support (e.g. appropriate materials, in-service training).

I became very interested in these children's lives, and after leaving Sweden I was determined to find a job where I could learn and contribute to the improvement of their condition. When I reflect on this today, it is a matter of some amazement that with little real experience other than my willingness to learn, I convinced the Head of the Department of the Ministry of Education responsible for the teaching of Portuguese to emigrant children to provide me with a suitable position. During my tenure there, I edited a magazine to be sent to emigrant students all over the world; I prepared teaching materials, and I facilitated seminars and workshops for teachers. I visited classes in Germany, England and Canada, and I worked with the immigrant teachers and heard about their concerns. What I learned made me more and more

committed to make this field my life's work.

After my first visit to Canada I was much impressed with the Heritage Language Programs in Ontario and the country's Multicultural policies. I went home determined to return and learn about what I saw as an ideal educational model.

Heritage Language Programs in Ontario

The term "heritage language" is widely used across Canada. Other terms such as non-official language, third language, ancestral language, mother tongue, ethnic language and minority language have been used to address the same issue. There has been a history of strong opposition to heritage language in the past, in spite of the national myth and cliche that Canada has always fostered tolerance of cultural diversity (the Canadian "mosaic" in opposition to the American "melting pot"). In Troper's words:

> According to this vision we have always had an unofficial multicultural policy and [the declaration of this policy] in 1971 only made official what Canadians have accepted as well and true... if anything the opposite is closer to the truth. (...) Ethnicity, if tolerated at all, was seen as a temporary stage through which one passed on the road to full assimilation. Prolonged ethnicity identification ... was seen as a pathological condition to be overcome, not as a source of national enrichment and pride. (Troper, 1979)

For the first half of the century, immigrant children were not encouraged to speak their first language. Assimilation or Canadianization were the dominant educational perspectives. Bilingualism was seen as a disadvantage rather than a benefit. The learning of the child's first language in addition to the learning of English or French was seen as causing confusion in children's thinking. Current research has shown the opposite. Children are able to learn many languages and the maintenance of the child's first or "heritage" language has been recognized as contributing to a greater self-esteem, pride in one's origins and family harmony.

The learning of many languages can only increase tolerance among all groups in the Canadian society.

Education in Canada is the responsibility only of the Provincial government. Thus, in the absence of Federal guidelines, educational policy in general and Heritage Language programs specifically vary widely across the country.

In Ontario, Memorandum 46 (1976-1977) has allowed the implementation of the Heritage Language Program since July 1, 1977. It came as a response to persistent ethnic demands. Ethnic languages were already being taught in the evening in many community run schools. The fact that in the Metropolitan Toronto Separate School Board, Italian classes were already being offered funded by the Italian government for several years (Berryman, 1986; Danesi and DiGiovanni,1989) forced the Ontario government to take a position. According to Berryman:

> This apparent interference by a foreign government in the Ontario schooling process, which undoubtedly was a definite concern of the Government of Ontario, had a strong impact on the Government to finally adopt its Heritage Languages Program. (Berryman,1986)

Contrary to the rationale for Heritage Language learning in other countries (which focus on minimizing academic difficulties), in Ontario, the Ministry of Education clearly underlines the enrichment potential of heritage language promotion. In its information pamphlet on the program (Ministry of Education, no date) the following statements are made:

The Heritage Language program will:

- enhance the students' concept of themselves and their

heritage;
- improve communication with parents and grandparents;
- encourage all students to develop new language skills that will help them function more effectively in Canada's multicultural environment as well as in the international community.

In spite of this rationale, and the multicultural federal educational policies which apparently promote the students' mother language maintenance, Cummins and Danesi claim that institutionalized discrimination continues to operate, discouraging students of developing full competence in their first language. Several arguments are presented:

- Legal prohibition or constraints on the use of Heritage Language as language of instruction in some provinces (e.g. Ontario);

- Legal constraints on the extent to which Heritage Languages can be legitimized educationally by being taught within the regular school day;

- Absence of structures whereby Heritage Language teachers can obtain in-service training and accreditation for the teaching of heritage languages;

- Omission of issues relating to minority students' bilingualism and processes of language learning in both the teacher courses offered by Faculties of Education and in graduate level courses pursued by psychoeducational consultants and other special educators The result is the perpetuation of incorrect belief systems that promote discriminatory practices. For example, advising minority parents to switch to English as the language of communication at home (Cummins and Danesi, 1990)

Heritage Language Teachers

Since Heritage Language instruction is funded under the Continuing Education Program, instructors need not have an Ontario

Teacher's Certification, and can be paid at a lower rate than the regular classroom teacher. Sixteen years after the official establishment of the program there is still no provision for certification for Heritage Language teachers in any of Ontario Faculties of Education. Many attempts have been made to change this inequitable situation. In "The Final Report of the Work Group on Third Language Instruction - Towards a Comprehensive Language Policy" (1982) one of the recommendations clearly says:

> That the Ontario Ministry of Education be requested to establish a Diploma for the teaching of Heritage Languages ... with clearly stated standards and requirements, and to provide the appropriate study and training (1982,p.40).

In his 1983 report "Heritage Languages: Endangered Speeches", the Commissioner of Official languages (Max Yalden) stated:

> One does not have to look far or very searchingly to know that minority languages that are not given a modicum of institutional support are condemned to a more or less inescapable demise.

Who teaches the Heritage Languages? Some instructors are qualified teachers holding certificates from their country of origin which are not recognized in Ontario; some are recent immigrants who speak the language fluently but do not necessarily have a degree; still others are university students with some knowledge in the language. One has to ask if that variety of experiences is consistent with non-discriminatory educational policies. To teach the Heritage Languages one needs to attend a program in second language methodology and first language methodology, and it is imperative that the Heritage Language

instructor learn about the community and especially about specific problems experienced by children whose first language is not a standard form of the language (Mollica, 1989). Faculties of Education in Ontario do not offer such learning opportunities to Heritage Language teachers.

Heritage Language teachers, therefore, occupy a lower status than the regular classroom colleagues. That status, coupled with a general negative attitude towards language learning in the Canadian school system, influences the perceptions students have of the language their parents/grandparents taught them. This may contribute to their lack of self-esteem and hence a lack of success in school. The important role that first language learning plays has been documented by researchers in Canada (Asworth, 1985, 1988; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Cummins, 1989; Cummins and Danesi, 1990). Parents and community groups have always been a strong support and have given input on this issue. Consider this quotation from a response by the Ukrainian Canadian Committee School Board (Toronto Branch) to the Ontario Ministry of Education to its "Proposal for Action" on improving the Heritage Language Programs:

> In order for a child to develop and maintain a concept of self-esteem and pride in the ethnocultural tradition of his/her ancestors the child's community roots need to be reinforced within the provincial educational system. The child's roots are not "enrichment". On the contrary, they are a vital part of the child's being. When viewing the entire child, it is not possible to divorce the home, the cultural roots and the general society. As a result, heritage language instruction should not be part of the continuing (enrichment) education, but a comprehensive part of a child's educational process) (1987,p.2).

Heritage Language Teacher - "Interpreter" of two cultures?

How do Heritage Language instructors integrate in the schools they teach? Teresa has been teaching Portuguese in the programs for fifteen years. She says:

> It is difficult to work in collaboration with the other teachers. I teach 14 classes a week. I have too many classes, too many children. Sometimes, when a newly arrived student comes to school, the regular classroom teacher comes to me to ask for help in assessing this child. When there is a behaviour problem or the child is having difficulties, but that is not a general practice. It seems there is never enough time. I hardly go to the staff room and meet the others.

Teresa is fortunate, however. She has a full-time job, and has all her classes in the same school. She has a room where she can use the board and display her students' work. She has books, maps and everything she needs to teach. This is not necessarily the case for most teachers. Marta, a teacher in another school board travels to four different schools to teach her classes. She feels she is an intruder in the classroom whenever she arrives to teach her lesson. The other teachers leave their resources on top of their desks, the board completely covered, and a note stating "Do not erase". She has to bring her own books and visual aids if she dares to try something innovative. Students make her feel like an outsider. She says:

> I hardly speak with any of the regular teachers. When? We do not have the opportunity to meet. I do not feel I am one of them. Some welcome my coming because it is an half an hour break for them, but others make me feel like if I am interrupting their job. The same happens with the principals. I spend most of the year without even seeing them. It is as if I do not exist.

When asked if they plan together or have opportunity of discussing the curriculum and ways of integrating their program, most teachers answer negatively for the reasons above mentioned.

How do Heritage Language teachers perceive themselves? Teresa says:

> I see myself as an interpreter of two cultures. I know that my students come from homes where parents give much importance to their culture and language. On the other hand these students want to be like everybody else in school, they do not want to be different. I try to make them feel good about what they bring from home and what they can learn in school. Instead of feeling less, they have the potential to feel more. Both languages and cultures can be integrated, I think that is my role, to help them understand the value of both.

CONCLUSION

At present, in the province of Ontario Heritage Language Programs are offered to 120,000 students in 63 different languages. In 1991, Ontario became home to over 118,000 new residents. A quarter of them were aged between 5 and 15. Just under 9,000 of these spoke neither English or French as their first language. (Silipo, T., 1993). It is difficult to accept that programs such as English as a Second Language and Heritage Language Programs are not priority items on the agenda of the Ministry of Education. They play a major role in the full integration and education of our children. In a recent address to 750 Heritage Language teachers the former Minister of Education expressed strong views on the program and announced some measures which were to be implemented immediately. He began by saying:

> Heritage Language education must move from the periphery into the mainstream of language options offered in our schools. (Silipo, 1992)

His government's commitment to the program is based on the belief that "if the society belittles or treats my native tongue as a quaint curiosity, it tells me that I too am not a valued and equal member of society" (Silipo,1992). In July 1992, an amendment to The Education Act was made to address the issue of ethnocultural equity and racism in Ontario schools. The way schools treat the Heritage Language of their students mirrors their manner towards race, culture and identity. Some major changes are going to be made. The Minister announced that a Advisory Group on Heritage Languages was to be formed, with a mandate to present in three to

four months an action plan for significant improvement and greater integration of the program.

I am a member of that Advisory Group (which has been meeting for several months now) and our recommendations will very soon be reported to Dave Cooke, the new Minister of Education. There is no question that decisive changes are necessary - the certification of Heritage Language Instructors having the hightest priority. The Group believes that school boards and Faculties of Education will have to collaborate to find ways of putting an end to an unequal and discriminatory situation regarding the education of these teachers. A decade after the explicit recommendation presented in 1982, we are still facing the same situation - Heritage Teachers are marginalized and continue to have no voice in their schools.

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